

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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SUBJECT: DRUG TRAFFIC: PRESS REPORTS COLOMBIAN REACTIONS TO
(A) CBS PROGRAM'S CORRUPTION CHARGES

REF: BOGOTA 3180; (B) BOGOTA 3198

1. IMPLIED CORRUPTION CHARGES AGAINST HIGH GOC OFFICIALS IN THE
RECENT CBS "SIXTY MINUTES" PROGRAM ON DRUG TRAFFICKING
RELEASED A FLOOD OF PROTEST ON APRIL 5 IN THE LOCAL PRESS BY COLOMBIA
N
LEADERS.

2. LIBERAL PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE TURBAY, ONE OF THOSE NAMED IN
THE PROGRAM ALONG WITH MINISTER OF DEFENSE VARON, AND MINISTER OF
LABOR MONTOYA, MADE PUBLIC HIS EXCHANGE OF LETTERS WITH THE
AMBASSADOR (SEPT). TURBAY IS REPORTED AS SAYING THAT HE IS
SATISFIED THAT HIS NAME HAS BEEN CLEARED, BUT THAT HE IS
CONSIDERING LEGAL ACTION AGAINST CBS FOR
DEFAMATION OF CHARACTER.

3. VARON, WHO ALSO PUBLISHED HIS EXCHANGE WITH THE AMBASSADOR
(SEPT), CALLED THE CHARGES AN AFFRONT TO HIS OWN DIGNITY, AS
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WELL AS TO THAT OF THE COLOMBIAN NATION, ITS GOVERNMENT, AND
ITS ARMED FORCES. THE MINISTER OF LABOR HAS NOT YET
COMMENTED TO OUR KNOWLEDGE.

4. HERNANDO BARJUCH, NOW A MEMBER OF CONGRESS, DENIED CHARGES
THAT HAD BEEN RAISED IN THE CBS INTERVIEW WITH LOPEZ, BUT WHICH
WERE NOT INCLUDED IN THE PROGRAM, THAT HE HAD ISSUED A COLOMBIAN

PASSPORT TO A CUBAN-AMERICAN ALLEGEDLY INVOLVED IN DRUG TRAFFICKING WHILE THE FORMER WAS AMBASSADOR TO IRAN.

5. THE PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE AND THE PRESIDENT OF THE HOUSE FOREIGN RELATIONS AND DEFENSE COMMITTEE, IN SEPARATE PRESS STATEMENTS, CALLED THE CHARGES AN INSULT TO COLOMBIA. THE LATTER ADDED THAT THE ALLEGATIONS WERE INJURIOUS TO U.S. RELATIONS WITH LATIN AMERICA. THE SENATE REPORTEDLY PASSED A UNANIMOUS RESOLUTION EXPRESSING ITS WILLINGNESS TO COOPERATE WITH THE GOC "IN THE STRUGGLE AGAINST NEW KINDS OF CRIMES WHICH ARE FINANCED ABROAD."

6. ALL FOUR OF THE MAJOR BOGOTA DAILIES ON APRIL 5 PUBLISHED EDITORIALS CHARGING CBS WITH DISTORTION, DECRYING THE AFFRONT TO COLOMBIA'S NATIONAL HONOR, PROFESSING THE INNOCENCE OF THEIR COMPATRIOTS, AND, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THE ANTI-LOPEZ, CONSERVATIVE "REPUBLICA," BLAMING THE U.S. FOR CORRUPTING COLOMBIANS. THE LIBERAL "TIEMPO" WENT FARTHER AND CALLED INTO QUESTION THE U.S. STRATEGY OF EMPHASIZING A HIGHER COST FOR NARCOTICS IN THE U.S. OVER COMPLETE SUPPRESSION OF THE TRADE. "TIEMPO" MAINTAINS THAT SUCH A POLICY, BECAUSE OF THE GREATER AMOUNT OF MONEY INVOLVED, STIMULATES GREATER CORRUPTION IN LATIN AMERICA AND PUTS REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS IN A MORE DIFFICULT POSITION.

7. COMMENT: REGARDING THE SPECIFIC CBS INCIDENT, THE LOCAL NEGATIVE REACTION FOCUSES MORE ON THE TELEVISION NETWORK THAN ON THE USG. IN GENERAL, HOWEVER, THE U.S. IS ACCUSED OF
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BEING THE CORRUPTOR BECAUSE OF THE MARKET IT PROVIDES FOR DRUGS. THE ARGUMENT BEING ECHOED IS THAT A DEVELOPING NATION SUCH AS COLOMBIA CANNOT BE EXPECTED TO SUCCESSFULLY COMBAT DRUG TRAFFICKING IF EVEN THE POWERFUL U.S. HAS FAILED. WHILE THE LOCAL REACTION HAS BEEN WIDELY NEGATIVE, IT GENERALLY HAS NOT BEEN VITRIOLIC. MEDIA ATTENTION TO THE INCIDENT, AS OF APRIL 6, HAD ALREADY BEGUN TO TAPER-OFF AND WAS BALANCED BY PUBLICATION OF AN EXPLANATION BY CBS PRODUCER MOSES.
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